

**TESTIMONY OF
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BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
UNITED STATES SENATE
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INTRODUCTION

Good morning Mr. Chairman, Senator Voinovich, and members of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. I am pleased to have the opportunity to be here on "Great Lakes Day" to discuss the Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes that was developed by the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration. I would like to specifically acknowledge, Mr. Voinovich, your leadership and efforts in support of restoring and protecting the Great Lakes -- one of our country's most important environmental treasures.

As we begin, I would like to highlight the \$70 million request for the Great Lakes included in the President's FY07 budget for EPA. Nearly \$50 million of this request is to fund the Great Lakes Legacy Act. This represents essentially full funding of the authorized levels in the Great Lakes Legacy Act (GLLA) for cleanup of contaminated sediments in the Areas of Concern, and is a clear demonstration of the Administration's commitment to the restoration and protection of the Great Lakes.

BACKGROUND

On May 18, 2004, President Bush signed the Great Lakes Executive Order establishing the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force and Promoting a Regional Collaboration of National Significance for the Great Lakes.

The Interagency Task Force was created to increase and improve collaboration and integration among the more than 140 federal programs that help fund and implement environmental restoration and management activities throughout the Great Lakes system. It was also designed to help ensure that these programs are funding effective, coordinated, and environmentally-sound activities.

The purpose of the Regional Collaboration was to create a partnership among the federal government, Great Lakes States, tribal and local governments, communities, and other interests to address nationally significant environmental and natural resource issues involving the Great Lakes.

Much has been accomplished to date to meet both of these objectives.

PROGRESS TO DATE/ NEXT STEPS

The Interagency Task Force

In its October 2005 report to the President on Implementation of the Great Lakes Executive Order, the Federal Interagency Task Force estimated that the federal government spends approximately half a billion dollars annually in support of Great Lakes water quality improvement programs.

In addition, the Administration recently has committed to begin implementing 48 near term actions in 2006 to help speed restoration and protection of the Great Lakes. These activities address issues in all eight of the priority areas identified in the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration's recently-released Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes.

Examples of these activities at EPA include: developing a standardized sanitary survey form, for use by the State and local governments to help identify sources of contamination affecting public beaches in the Great Lakes; providing improved policy guidance on managing peak flows at sanitary sewer plants to reduce overflows; conducting surveillance for emerging chemicals of concern; and, working with the Corps of Engineers to streamline and improve the permitting process for projects to restore wetlands and other aquatic habitat in the Great Lakes Basin.

These efforts are larger than EPA, however, and include collaborative efforts with our sister agencies. These activities include: restoring productive fisheries through efforts of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission in partnership with States, Tribes, and Canada[r1]; conducting rapid watershed assessments on critical watershed areas to collect natural resource data and applying critical conservation on the ground through the Department of Agriculture; supporting authorization to make permanent the demonstration barrier on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal through the Corps of Engineers; and, joining with the States in an equally shared effort to develop wetlands restoration plans that will enhance and protect a total of 200,000 acres through the Great Lakes Federal Interagency Task Force.

Next Steps

Of equal importance to these specific activities is the Task Force's attention to its charge to improve collaboration and integration among relevant federal programs in the Great Lakes. To this end, the Task Force is developing a work plan for its efforts to address all components of the Executive Order, including fostering consistent federal policies toward the Great Lakes, developing outcome based goals, improving the exchange of information, coordinating scientific research programs, and collaborating with Canada on binational issues.

The Regional Collaboration of National Significance

The collaborative effort envisioned in the Great Lakes Executive Order became a reality with the formation of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration (GLRC) in December 2004. The Collaboration partners, through the outstanding efforts of the eight Strategy Teams, spent the subsequent year developing recommendations for restoring and protecting the Great Lakes. After receiving extensive public input to the draft recommendations, the GLRC released its final Strategy last December. As part of the resolution signed at the ceremony marking the release of the Strategy, all of the Collaboration partners affirmed that the Strategy will guide future efforts to protect and restore the Great Lakes.

Next Steps

This unprecedented document offers a unique opportunity to make real improvements to the Great Lakes. For the first time, all levels of government, as well as our non-governmental partners, will be looking to the same goals, objectives, and recommendations to help guide their actions regarding the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration will continue into the future to guide implementation of the Strategy. The partners have been working on an implementation framework, which will ensure the plan is carried out and accomplishments are reported on.

The President's Fiscal Year 2007 Budget Request

The Administration already is using the Strategy as a guide as it plans its future activities in the Great Lakes basin. For example, the President's FY07 budget contains several requests for funding that will support priorities in the GLRC Strategy:

- As I mentioned earlier in my testimony, the budget for EPA includes essentially full funding of the authorized levels in the Great Lakes Legacy Act for cleanup of the Areas of Concern, almost \$50 million or approximately 70% more than appropriated in FY 2006. This funding will help leverage at least \$25 million from our State and local partners as well. Already, 200,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediments were remediated through the Legacy Act in 2004 and 2005. We estimate that in 2006 and 2007, GLLA projects will remediate over 650,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediments.
- Several of USDA's conservation programs, including the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program and the Conservation Security Program, would see increases. Of particular note is a proposed increase of 100,000 acres and \$153 million^[r2] over FY06 enacted levels for the Wetlands Reserve Program. These are all national programs, of course, but the Great Lakes basin stands to benefit as well.
- In support of Great Lakes regional collaboration, NOAA's budget requests \$1.5 million to establish a Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Program that will mobilize NOAA's restoration assets to restore the Great Lakes' aquatic resources. This funding will be used to identify an optimal restoration plan and to provide outreach, facilitation and technical assistance to stakeholders and communities participating in the restoration activities. In addition, NOAA's budget contains an increase in funding of \$1.5 million for its nation-wide Aquatic Invasive Species Program, a portion of which will benefit the Great Lakes.
- With an increase of nearly \$18 million, the Corps of Engineers will continue construction of the McCook Reservoir flood damage reduction project that will virtually eliminate the backflows of raw sewage to Lake Michigan, reducing beach closings, and enhancing coastal health.

- And with an increase of over \$12 million, the Corps of Engineers also will continue construction of a facility for the safe and effective management of more than 4 million cubic yards of contaminated sediments from the Indiana Harbor navigation channel and adjacent areas.
- A portion of the increase for the Department of the Interior's North American Wetlands Conservation Fund will help advance wetlands restoration in the Great Lakes.
- The Department of the Interior – Fish and Wildlife Service budget includes funding for its Aquatic Invasive Species Program and an increase of more than \$3.3 million to restore fish habitat and fish passage under the National Fish Habitat Initiative, portions of which also benefit the Great Lakes.

CONCLUSION

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you and the Committee for inviting me to participate in this hearing. The Administration looks forward to working with you and all of our Collaboration partners to continue this important work, because it is only through concerted, coordinated action that we will realize our mutually-held goal of a cleaner, healthier Great Lakes. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.